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ABSTRACT

Questionnaires on individualized education programs (IEPs) were completed by 168 parents of handicapped children (10 to 17 years old). Analysis of the ten participant categories (i.e., mother, teacher, psychologist) found that two participant categories, the child's mother and the special education teacher, attended at least one IEP conference 75% of the time. IEP participant attendance significantly varied by each handicapping condition, age level, and type of school district. Four factors were suggested as causes of lack of participation in IEP conferences: (1) poor coordination and communication between interdisciplinary team members: (2) negative attitudes of specific interdisciplinary teams' responsibilities: (3) unavailability of professional staff for conference participation: and (4) a lack of knowledge about P.L. 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act). (CL)

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PARTICIPATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IEP: PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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PARTICIPATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IEP: PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, P.L. 94-142, mandates that free, appropriate education be made available to all children, including the handicapped, and provides new directives toward positive educational practices. A major component of this federal legislation stipulates that a written Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.) must be developed for all handicapped children. Each handicapped child's individualized education program is to be reviewed annually with written documentation of the participants involved in the I.E.P. development process. In addition, "the public agency shall insure that each I.E.P. meeting includes the following participants: 1) a representative of the public agency, other than the child's teacher, who is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of special education; 2) the child's teacher; 3) one or both of the child's parents, subject to section 121a.345 (Federal Register; August 23, 1977); 4) the child, where appropriate; and 5) other individuals at the discretion of the agency" (Federal Register; August 23, 1977; 121a.344).

Mandated changes in the education of handicapped children by parental participation in the development of the I.E.P. and procedural safeguards (Federal Register; August 23, 1977; 121.501) has required that the educator acknowledge the changing role of the parent within the educational system (Yoshida et al., 1978). Evaluation of the written I.E.P. has indicated a need for quantifiable documentation of communication with parents regarding written programs (Anderson et al., 1978).

The purpose of this investigation is to provide an indication of the

degree to which the mandates of P.L. 94-142 for consumer participation have begun to be implemented in the public schools since enactment. The data were obtained from parents of the handicapped children. The study describes whether an I.E.P. was written for their children, who attended the I.E.P. conferences, how often the I.E.P.s were reviewed, parents' and children's input into the I.E.P.s, and whether the parents' and/or children's requests were written into the I.E.P.

Method

Subjects

One hundred sixty-eight parents of school age handicapped children living in the state of Oregon were involved in the study. The parents were seen as a representative sample of handicapped children's parents who participated in I.E.P. conferences. All handicapped children attended a public school during at least one academic year since 1977. As shown in Table 1, 66% attended eight school districts (numbers 2 through 9) in the urban/suburban Portland metropolitan area and 44% attended public schools in the remainder of the state (number 1). The sample studied generally reflected all handicapped population densities within the state of Oregon. The handicapped children in this study ranged in age from 10 years to 17+ years.

Insert Table 1 about here

The primary handicapping conditions consisted of educable mentally retarded (EMR), trainable mentally retarded (TMR), emotionally disturbed (ED), deaf blind (D/B), physically handicapped (PH), and learning disabled (LD). A percentage distribution of primary handicapping conditions is shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Apparatus

The instrument utilized was a four page questionnaire which took approximately five to eight minutes to complete. The contents of the questionnaire included the following variety of questions: a) who attended the I.E.P. conference; b) parent/student involvement in developing the I.E.P.; c) determination of how often the I.E.P. was reviewed; d) assessment of school districts' roles in meeting the needs of handicapped children; and e) public relations with parents. The format of the questionnaire included both multiple choice and simple yes/no questions in a dichotomous response format.

Procedures

Following examination of the Federal Register (August 23, 1977), two main topic areas were identified as being important to this study. The topic areas identified were: who participated in the I.E.P. conference (section 121a.344), and how frequently the I.E.P.s are reviewed (section 121a.343). From these two topic areas the questionnaire was developed.

Two hundred seventy-one Parent Questionnaires were mailed with a self-addressed, stamped return envelope during the month of August, 1978. Two weeks following the initial mailing a follow-up card was mailed to all participants encouraging the questionnaire completion and thanking those who had already responded.

The completed questionnaires were computer analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie, 1975). Analysis was based on the two topic areas identified in the questionnaire results:

1) a percentage analysis of I.E.P. conference attendance for all participants; 2) all participants were cross-tabulated with their percent of I.E.P. conference attendance by the demographic categories of primary handicapping conditions, chronological age, and school district attendance; 3) frequency counts of parents' and students' involvement in the development of the I.E.P.; and 4) a frequency count illustrating how often updates of the I.E.P. were conducted.

Results

One hundred sixty-eight correctly completed questionnaires were returned from the 271 sent out. The questionnaire return rate was 61.9%.

An analysis of the ten participant categories (i.e., mother, teacher, psychologist) found two participant categories, the handicapped child's mother and the special education teacher, attending at least one I.E.P. conference 75% of the time. Attendance of at least one I.E.P. conference for the remaining 8 participant categories was 30% or less. Participants' attendance as reported by the handicapped children's parents is illustrated in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The cross-tabulation of all I.E.P. conference participants' attendance with the seven handicapping conditions found I.E.P. participant attendance to vary significantly by each handicapping condition, x^2 (40) = 192.2, $p \leq .01$. Mothers of emotionally disturbed children attended 77.7% of the time, while mothers of children with all other handicapping conditions attended 99% of the time. Special education teachers of the emotionally

disturbed attended 55.5% of the time, physically handicapped 57%, and learning disabled 60%, which was less often than special education teachers serving the other handicapping conditions, who attended 80% of the time. The regular classroom teachers were more involved with the deaf or blind (80%) and physically handicapped (64.3%) in comparison to the other handicapping conditions (20%). The administrators were more involved in the development of the I.E.P. for the TMR (42.5%) and EMR (36.8%) students than any other handicapping condition (20%) Overall, the physically handicapped children attended their I.E.P. conferences more often (35.6%) than any other handicapping condition (13.1%).

The cross-tabulation of all I.E.P. conference participants' attendance with five age levels (8-10 years, 11-13 years, 14-16 years, and 17+ years) found I.E.P. participant attendance to vary significantly by age level, x^2 (24) = 75.56, $p \leq .05$. The percent of regular education teachers participating in I.E.P. conferences for 17+ year old handicapped students was 16.7%; the attendance ratio was higher in all other age levels (35%). The school psychologist attended I.E.P. conferences more frequently for the 17+ year olds (33%) than at any other age level (9%). The handicapped students' participation in the I.E.P. conference dramatically increased with chronological age, 8-10 years at 14.5%, 11-13 years at 14.9%, 14-16 years at 20.8%, and 17+ years at 41.7%.

The cross-tabulation of all I.E.P. conference participants' attendance with the nine school districts involved in the study found the suburban school districts to have a significantly higher ratio of participant representation than all other school districts, x^2 (21) = 194.14, $p \leq .01$.

An analysis of the requested changes and suggestions included in the

I.E.P., requests written into the I.E.P., and signatures on the I.E.P. found parents participating in these I.E.P. processes between 60% and 85% of the time, and the handicapped children participating between 17% and 52% of the time as shown in Figure 2. The parents' and handicapped children's involvement in the development of the I.E.P. was based on 32 handicapped children and 156 parents who attended at least one I.E.P. conference.

Insert Figure 2 about here

A frequency count itemizing how often updates were conducted on the I.E.P. indicated 11% of the I.E.P.s were updated every two months, 26% every three months, 14% every four months, 8% every five months, 7% every six months, 1% every seven months, 2% every eight months, 5% every nine months, and 25% of the I.E.P.s were not updated.

Discussion

Mandates by federal legislation (Federal Register, August 23, 1977, 121a.344) stipulated who is to be in attendance when developing the Individualized Education Program. This study indicated an extremely low percent of overall I.E.P. conference attendance with the exception of the handicapped child's mother and the special education teacher. The implications of the attendance ratio jeopardizes the intent of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. It can be assumed the special education teacher not only represents her role in the I.E.P. conference, but is representing all other members of the public agency interdisciplinary team.

Additional analysis of participants in attendance indicated primary handicapped conditions, chronological age, and school district attendance each significantly affected "who" and "how many" participants were involved in an I.E.P. conference. Interestingly, the low incidence handicapped

student (deaf, blind, or physically handicapped) had the highest rate of regular classroom teacher I.E.P. conference attendance. An open and supportive communication system between the regular and special educator is a necessity in providing successful integration of the handicapped. Without the regular classroom teachers' participation in development of the I.E.P., it would appear that the handicapped child has a low probability of effective mainstreaming. Even though the overall handicapped student participation was extremely low (19%), a dramatic attendance increase was found as the students' chronological age increased. This may reflect school districts'/parents' decisions to include handicapped students more frequently with the increase of their age, but other variables such as handicapping condition and degree of involvement need to be considered and analyzed in order to greatly increase handicapped students' involvement in the I.E.P. conference. Several factors may be detrimentally affecting I.E.P. conference participation: 1) poor coordination and communication between interdisciplinary team members; 2) negative attitudes of specific interdisciplinary teams' responsibilities; 3) unavailability of professional staff for conference participation; and 4) a lack of knowledge of P.L. 94-142 mandates.

Further evaluation as to the effect of time, money and public awareness on the level of participation given to the I.E.P. conference needs to be completed. The I.E.P. conference should be an avenue of communication between parent, student, and resource professionals for the handicapped. A major step towards improving the I.E.P. conference that should be easily implemented by most districts would be an increased attendance by interdisciplinary team members. It is recommended that similar studies in other states be undertaken in order to determine the general applicability of these findings to other regions of the country.

School districts should take the leadership responsibility of monitoring I.E.P. conference participant attendance in order to insure an increase in district professional conference representation. Future studies should investigate appropriateness and quality of Individualized Education Programs in meeting the intent of P.L. 94-142.

References

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Table 1

School District	Total Handicapped Student Population Per School District	Total Handicapped Student Population Involved in Study	Primary Handicapping Condition							
			EMR	TMR	ED	DEAF	BLIND	PH	LD	
1	36,351	74	*18 **36.7	40 60.6	3 33.3	1 33.3	1 50.0	3 21.4	8 32.3	
2	2,997	39	9 18.4	10 15.2	3 33.3	1 33.3	1 50.0	9 64.3	6 24.0	
3	811	13	5 10.2	2 3.0	1 11.1	1 33.3	0 0	0 0	4 16.0	
4	768	6	3 6.1	1 1.5	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 7.1	1 4.0	
5	698	3	1 2.0	2 3.0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	
6	263	9	3 6.1	1 1.5	1 11.1	0 0	0 0	0 0	4 16.0	
7	237	13	5 10.2	6 9.1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	2 8.0	
8	237	3	1 2.0	2 3.0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	
9	83	7	4 8.2	2 3.0	1 11.1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	
		Number of Handicapped	49	66	9	3	2	14	25	N = 68

* Handicapping condition breakdown of students involved in study

** Percentage of primary handicapped students by school district involved in this study

Table 2

Percentage Distribution
of Primary Handicapping Conditions

Primary Condition	EMR	TMR	ED	Deaf	Blind	PH	LD	
%	29.2	39.3	5.4	1.8	1.2	8.3	25	= 100

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Percentage of participant categories attending I.E.P. conferences.

Figure 2. Parent and child involvement in the development of the I.E.P.

FIGURE 1

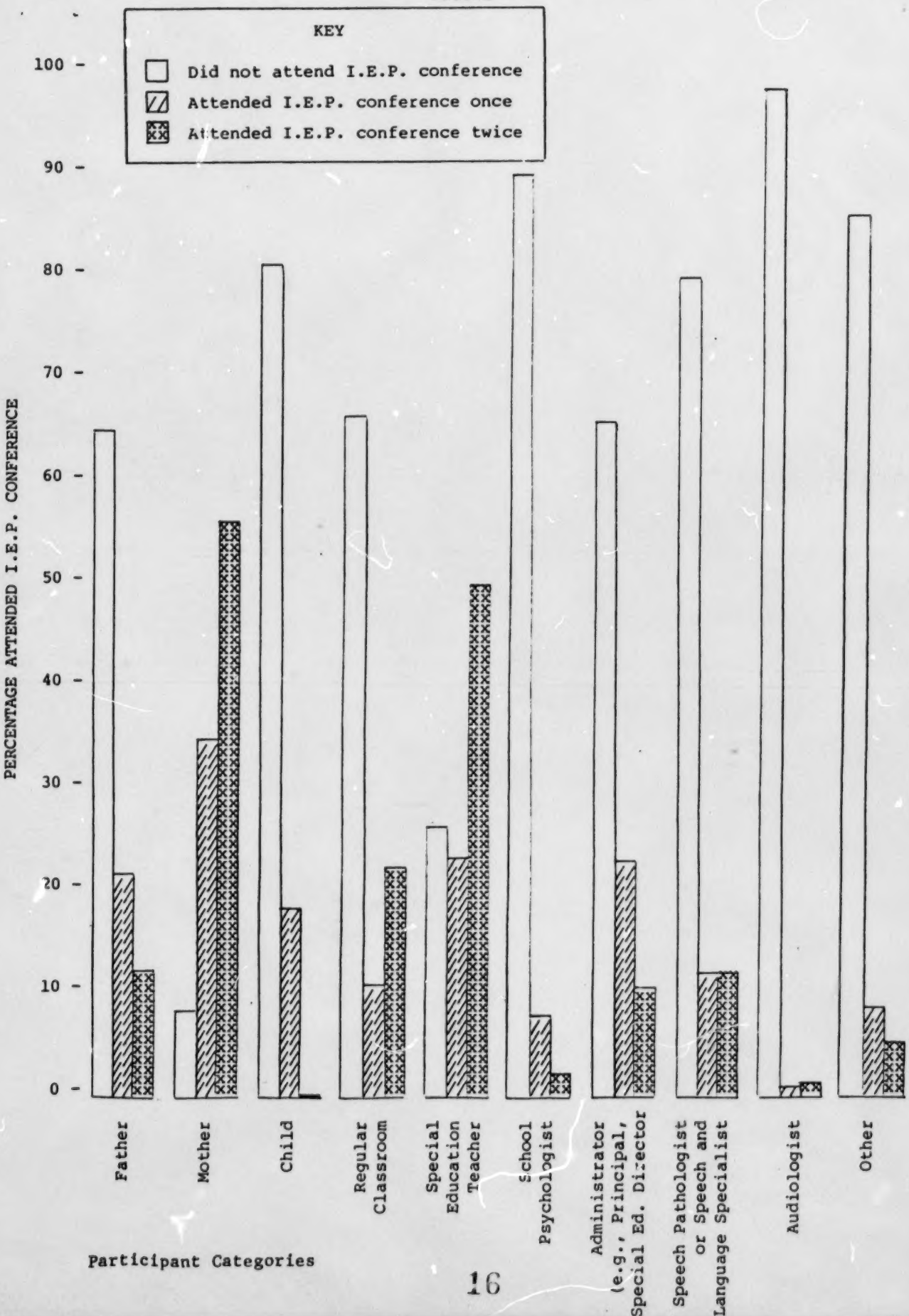
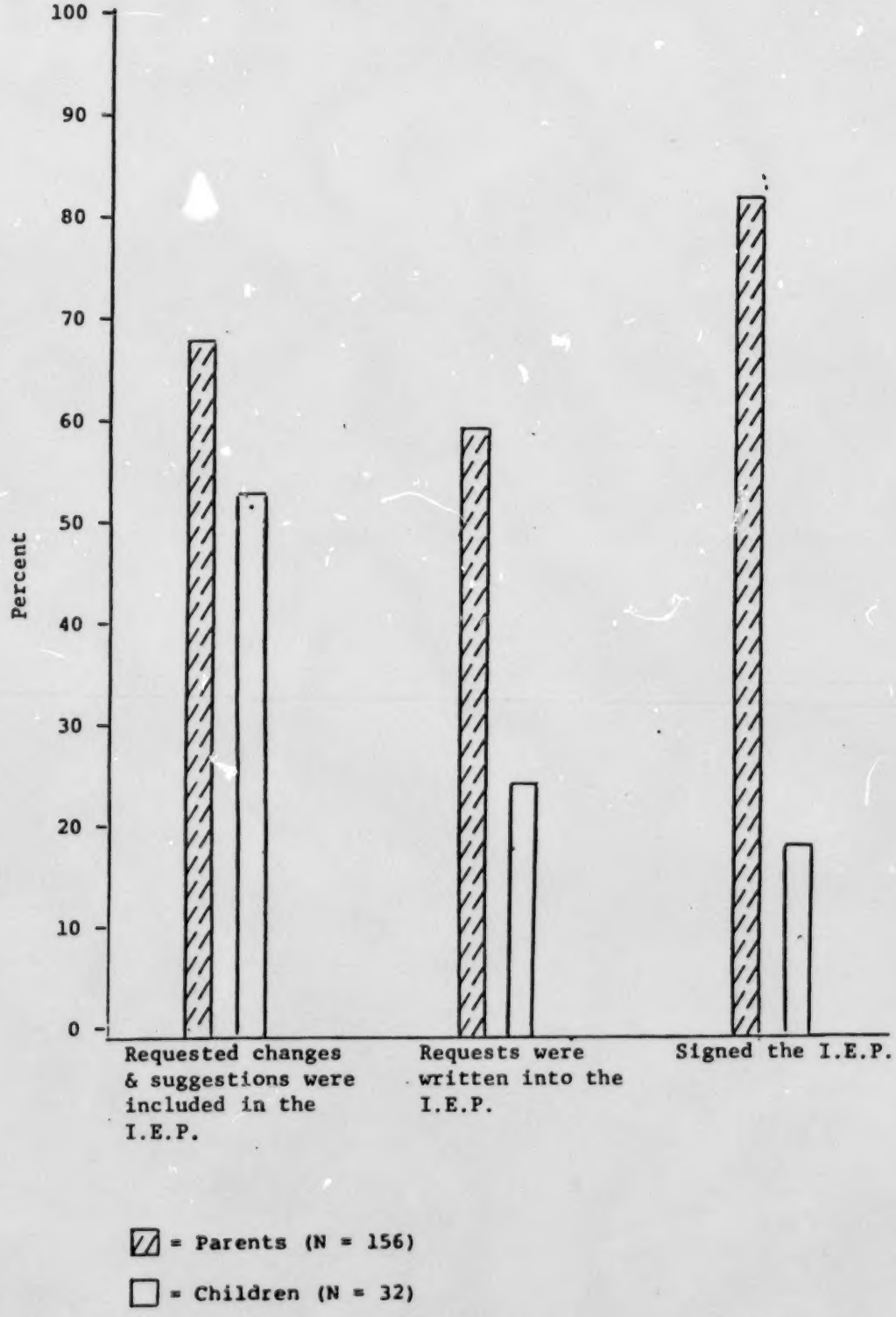

KEY
Did not attend I.E.P. conference
Attended I.E.P. conference once
Attended I.E.P. conference twice
PERCENTAGE ATTENDED I.E.P. CONFERENCE
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Father
Mother
Child
Regular Classroom
Special Education Teacher
School Psychologist
Administrator (e.g., Principal, Special Ed. Director
Speech Pathologist or Speech and Language Specialist
Audiologist
Other
Participant Categories

FIGURE 2


100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Percent
Requested changes & suggestions were included in the I.E.P.
Requests were written into the I.E.P.
Signed the I.E.P.
= Parents (N = 156)
= Children (N = 32)